Permission to go abroad for religious purpose

†2145. SHRI DILIP SINGH JUDEV: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the number of persons to whom permission to go abroad for religious purposes alongwith necessary documents has been issued during the last three years, year-wise;

(b) the countries for which these were issued;

(c) the names of the country for which grant for visit has been provided and the names of the countries for visit in which piligrimage taxes have been imposed; and

(d) the details of the amount of grant provided and taxes collected annually and the nature of grant and taxes?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ANAND SHARMA): (a) and (b) The Government's permission is not required for Indian citizens to go abroad for religious purpose. The Government is assisting/facilitating pilgrimages for Haj to Saudi Arabia, Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in China and pilgrimages to Sikh Gurudwaras and Hindu Temples in Pakistan.

In case of Haj pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia fixes an annual quota for pilgrims from different countries to perform Haj. The persons going for Haj to Saudi Arabia through the Central Haj Committee (CHC) are provided a special document called the Pilgrim Pass (in lieu of Passport) which is valid for travel to Saudi Arabia only for Haj; those who go to Saudi Arabia for Haj through private tour operators travel on the basis of regular passports. The number of Pilgrim Passes issued by the Central Haj Committee during the last three years is as follows:

Year	No. of Pilgrim Passes
2003	72,634
2004	75,139
2005	83,298

The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in China is conducted on the basis of regular passports. The number of pilgrims who performed this Yatra in the last three years is as follows:

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Year	No. of Pilgrims
2003	316
2004	537
2005	529

The pilgrimages to Sikh Gurudwaras and Hindu Temples in Pakistan are also performed on the basis of regular passports. The number of pilgrims undertaking this pilgrimage in the last three years was as follows:

Year	No. of Pilgrims
2003	3776
2004	7636
2005	8179

(c) and (d) The Government has been providing subsidy towards air fare for Haj pilgrims going through the Central Haj Committee to Mecca. The amount of subsidy in the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Subsidy (in crores)
2003	172.63
2004	160.70
2005	179.66

*Figures are provisional.

The Government paid Rs. 3250/- for each pilgrim to Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam for arrangements made by them for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra; other facilities provided by the Government included free medical assistance, security and escort cover by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police till the Lipulekh Pass on the Indian side and provision of satellite phone and a Liaison Officer for each batch of pilgrims for use during emergency. For pilgrims going to Pakistan, the Indian High Commission in Islamabad sent Liaison Officers to look after the welfare of these pilgrims and assist them.

The Government of India has not imposed any tax on such pilgrimages. The Governments of Saudi Arabia, China and Pakistan do not charge any taxes from the pilgrims going for the above pilgrimages.